

JONAH

INTRODUCTION

Jonah is the book of the Bible which perhaps has been criticized more than any other. Unfortunately, many Christians thoughtlessly cast aspersions upon this important book in the canon of Scripture without realizing that they are playing into the hands of the critics and innocently becoming the dupes of the skeptics. You hear even Christians say, when they hear a tall story, "My, that's a Jonah!" What they really mean is that it is something that is hard, or maybe even impossible, to believe.

In warfare the tactic of the enemy is always to feel out the weak spot in the line of the opposition and to center his attack at that vantage point. Judging by this criterion, many critics have evidently come to the conclusion that the Book of Jonah is the vulnerable part of the divine record. This book is the spot where the enemy has leveled his heaviest artillery. As a result, the average Christian today feels that this is the weakest of the sixty-six links in the chain of the Scriptures. If this link gives away, then the chain is broken.

Is the Book of Jonah "the Achilles' heel" of the Bible? It is if we are to accept the ridiculous explanations of the critics. The translators of the Septuagint were the first to question the reasonableness of this book. They set the pattern for the avalanche of criticism which has come down to the present day. The ancient method of modernism is to allegorize the book and to classify it with Robinson Crusoe and Gulliver's Travels. Today liberalism uses the same tactics. They make of it an allegory, saying that actually it never took place at all.

Some of the extravagant theories of the critics are so farfetched and fantastic that they are almost ridiculous. It is much easier to believe the Book of Jonah as given than to believe their explanations of it. I would like to pass on to you some of these outlandish explanations of the Book of Jonah:

1. Some critics, without a scrap of evidence to support their claim, say that Jonah was the son of the widow of Zarephath.
2. There are some who have put forth the theory that Jonah had a dream in the ship while he was asleep during the storm and that the Book of Jonah is the account of his dream.
3. Some relate the Book of Jonah to the Phoenician myth of Hercules and the sea monster. There is no similarity at all and, again, they are reaching for an explanation.
4. Another group holds that, although Jonah was a real character and did take a ship to Tarshish, a storm wrecked the ship. Then after the storm and shipwreck, Jonah was picked up by another ship on which there was a fish for its figurehead, and that gives support for the record in the Book of Jonah. I can well understand that if Jonah had been picked up after the storm, he might have been unconscious for awhile. I can also imagine that he might have felt like he was in a fish at that time. But I'm of the opinion that after recovering, on about the second day, Jonah would have come to the conclusion that he was on a ship and not inside a fish!

5. Still others resort to the wild claim that there was a dead fish floating around and that Jonah took refuge in it during the storm. This group has a dead fish and a live Jonah. Before we are through with this book, I am going to turn it around and say that what we have is a live fish and a dead Jonah.

Therefore, liberalism largely takes the position that the Book of Jonah is nothing in the world but an allegory, that it is merely a fairy story to be put in the same category as Aesop's Fables. The producers of these speculations claim that the Book of Jonah is unreasonable, and they bring forth these theories to give credence to their story. It would be very interesting indeed to get Jonah's reactions to their "very reasonable" explanations.

We must dismiss all of these speculations as having no basis in fact, no vestige of proof from a historical standpoint, and as having existence only in the imaginations of the critics. It can be established that Jonah was an historical person, not a character from mythology. It can be ascertained on good authority that the account is accurate. And it can be shown that the message of the book is of utmost significance even for this crucial time in which we live.

Jonah is an historical character and the author of this book. I want to turn to an historical book, 2 Kings, where we read: "In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel began to reign in Samaria, and reigned forty and one years" ([2Kings 14:23](#)). As far as I know, no one has ever questioned that Jeroboam II lived, that he was a king in the northern kingdom of Israel, and that he reigned forty-one years. This is an historical record. We read further: "And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD: he departed not from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin. He restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain, according to the word of the LORD God of Israel, which he spake by the hand of his servant, Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet, which was of Gath-hepher" ([2Kings 14:24-25](#), italics mine). Jeroboam was a real person, Israel was a real nation, Hamath was a real place, and it is quite unlikely that this man Jonah is a figment of the imagination. This is an historical record, and it is reasonable to conclude that Jonah is an historical character.

It is begging the point to say that this is another Jonah. It is not reasonable to believe that there were two Jonahs whose fathers were named Amittai and who were both prophets. This is especially evident when it is observed that the name of Jonah was not a common name; after all, Jonah is not like our American surname of Jones! The only times that the name occurs in the Bible are in this reference in 2 Kings, in the Book of Jonah itself, and in the New Testament references to that book. There is only one Jonah in the Bible, and he is an historical person.

It is quite interesting in this regard to compare the case of Jonah with another of the prophets, Obadiah. As far as I know, no critic has ever questioned the existence of a man by the name of Obadiah who wrote the Book of Obadiah; yet there is not one historical record in either the Old or New Testament concerning Obadiah. The liberals accept Obadiah, but they reject Jonah. Why? Because they want to deny the miracle that is recorded here.

We have an historical record of Jonah in the Old Testament, and we also have one in the New Testament given by the greatest authority who has ever lived on this earth, the Lord Jesus Christ. He personally gave authenticity to the historical character of Jonah and to his experience in the fish. We read in [Luke 11:30](#), "For as Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation." Then in [Matthew 12:39-41](#) we read: "But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: for as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here."

The moment you question the historical record of the Book of Jonah, you question the credibility of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is very strange to hear the liberal say, "Jesus was the greatest teacher that ever lived," since one of the marks of a great teacher is that what he teaches is accurate and truthful. If Jesus is a great teacher, my friend, then His authentication of the Book of Jonah has to stand.

I want to conclude this section in which I have attempted to meet the objections of the critics by quoting the late Sir Winston Churchill on the subject of the inspiration of the Scriptures:

We reject with scorn all those learned and laboured myths that Moses was but a legendary figure upon whom the priesthood and the people hung their essential social, moral and religious ordinances. We believe that the most scientific view, the most up-to-date and rationalistic conception, will find its fullest satisfaction in taking the Bible story literally, and in identifying one of the greatest human beings with the most decisive leap forward ever discernible in the human story. We remain unmoved by the tomes of Professor Gradgrind and Dr. Dryasdust. We may be sure that all these things happened just as they are set out according to Holy Writ.

Jonah was a prophet, but his little book is not a prophecy -- that is, there is no prophecy of the future recorded in it. It is, instead, a personal account of a major event in the life of Jonah; as the narrator, he tells us his experience.

This narrative carries two great messages. We have here in miniature a picture of the nation Israel in the Great Tribulation period, a picture of how God will preserve His people, the 144,000 who are sealed in the Book of Revelation. We also have here a marvelous teaching concerning the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This book is actually prophetic of the Resurrection. The Lord Jesus Himself said that just as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, He also would be a sign to His generation in His resurrection from the dead.

The Book of Jonah is not a fish story, and that is something which really disturbs the gainsaying world which makes a great deal of how impossible it is to believe it. This book is a picture of a man who was raised from the dead, and of a throne in the midst of which "stood a Lamb as it had been slain." This Lamb is a resurrected Lamb, and a Christ-rejecting world will some day cry out, ". . . hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb" ([Rev. 6:16](#)).

Sometimes the literary excellence of this brief brochure is lost in the din made by the carping critics. It is well to recall the tribute paid by Charles Reade, the English literary critic and author, who wrote, "Jonah is the most beautiful story ever written in so small a compass." It is well to keep in mind that we have before us a literary gem, not a fish story.

Another salient point that I want to make is that the fish is neither the hero of the story nor the villain of the story. This book is not even about a fish, although the fish does become very important. The chief difficulty is in keeping a correct perspective. The fish is merely window dressing and cake trimming. In every play there are certain props and settings. It does not really matter whether Hamlet is played against a black, red, blue or white backdrop -- that is not the important thing. In the story of Jonah, the fish is among the props and does not occupy the star's dressing room.

In dealing with any book of the Bible, we need to distinguish between what Dr. G. Campbell Morgan calls the essentials and the incidentals. The incidentals in the Book of Jonah are the fish, the gourd, the east wind, the boat, and even the city of Nineveh. The essentials here are Jehovah and Jonah -- God and man -- that is what the book is all about.

Conservative scholars place the writing of the Book of Jonah before 745 B.C. The incidents took place about that time. Some even place it as early as 860 B.C. In my judgment, it seems best to place it between 800 and 750 B.C. Students of history will recognize this as the period when Nineveh, founded by Nimrod, was in its heyday, when the Assyrian nation was the great world power of the day. That nation was destroyed about 606 B.C. By the time of Herodotus, the Greek historian, the city of Nimrod had ceased to exist. When Xenophon passed the city, it was deserted, but he testified that the walls still stood and were 150 feet high. Historians now estimate they were 100 feet high and 40 feet thick. Nineveh, as we are going to see, was a great city, and we are told as much here in the record.

The brevity of the Book of Jonah is apt to lead the casual reader to the conclusion that there is nothing of particular significance here except the diatribe about the whale that swallowed Jonah. (The Greek word for whale is *kktos*, meaning "a great sea monster." Although it could have been a whale, I do not think it was -- for the Scripture tells us that a special fish was prepared.) But the Book of Jonah has four very brief chapters, and it is only a little more than twice as long as the Book of Obadiah, which is the shortest book in the Old Testament. Because it is very brief, we are apt to pass over it. However, we should not call any of these books "minor" prophets, for each is like a little atom bomb, just loaded with power and with a program of God.

There are six significant subjects which are suggested and developed in the Book of Jonah which make it very relevant for us today:

1. This is the one book of the Old Testament which sets forth the resurrection of Jesus Christ. All of the great doctrines of the Christian faith are set forth in certain books of the Old Testament. For instance, the Book of Exodus sets forth redemption. The deliverance from sin for the sinner who comes to Christ is illustrated in that book. In the Book of

Ruth you have the romance of redemption, the love side of redemption. In the Book of Esther, you have the romance of providence. The book of Job, I believe, teaches repentance. You can go through the Scriptures and find that the great doctrines of our faith are illustrated in various books of the Old Testament. The little Book of Jonah illustrates and teaches the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. If this book does not teach the great doctrine of resurrection, then this most important doctrine of the Christian faith is not illustrated by a book in the Old Testament. For this reason alone, I would say this is a significant book.

2. The Book of Jonah teaches that salvation is not by works, but by faith which leads to repentance. This little book is read by orthodox Jews on the great Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur. The way to God is not by works of righteousness which we have done, but by the blood of a substitutionary sacrifice provided by the Lord. The most significant statement in the Book of Jonah is in the second chapter. "Salvation is of the LORD" ([Jonah 2:9](#)). He is the author of salvation; He erected the great building of our salvation; He is the architect.

3. The third great purpose of this book is to show that God's purpose of grace cannot be frustrated. Jonah refused to go to Nineveh, but God was still going to get the message to Nineveh. The interesting thing in this particular case is that Jonah was going to be the witness for God in Nineveh -- he didn't know he was going there, but he did go.

4. The fourth great truth in this book is that God will not cast us aside for faithlessness. He may not use you, but He will not cast you aside. There are a lot of football players sitting on the bench; in fact, more sit on the bench than play in the game. A player is called out to play only when it is believed that he can make a contribution to the game. If you and I are faithless, God may bench us; but we are still wearing our uniform, and He will not cast us aside. Anytime we want to get back in the game of life and do His will, He will permit us to do it.

5. The fifth great truth is that God is good and gracious. Read [Jonah 4:2](#) for the most penetrating picture of God in the entire Bible. It is wrong to say that the Old Testament reveals a God of wrath and the New Testament reveals a God of love. He is no vengeful deity in the Book of Jonah.

6. The sixth and last great teaching is that God is the God of Gentiles. When God chose Abraham, in effect He said to the Gentiles, "I'm going to have to leave you for awhile because of the sin that has come into the human family. I'm going to prepare salvation for you through a man and a nation, and I'll bring the Redeemer, the Savior, into the world through them." Now God has a salvation for all mankind. I have written [Romans 3:29](#) over the Book of Jonah in my Bible. Paul writes, "Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also." The Book of Jonah reveals that even in the Old Testament God did not forget the Gentiles. If He was willing to save a woman like Rahab the harlot, and a brutal, cruel nation like the Assyrians, including inhabitants of Nineveh, its capital, then I want to say to you that God is in the business of saving sinners.

Outline

There are two approaches to the study of the Book of Jonah. The one that is the most popular and is followed by most commentators is to note the striking resemblance between Jonah and Paul. Both Paul and Jonah were missionaries to the Gentiles, both were cast into the sea, both were witnesses to the sailors on board the boat, and both were used to deliver those sailors from death. There are other striking comparisons, which a careful study would reveal. Including his trip to Rome, which I consider to be a missionary journey, there were actually four missionary journeys of the apostle Paul. The four chapters of the Book of Jonah may be divided into four missionary journeys of Jonah. The first journey was into the fish; the second was to the dry land; the third was to Nineveh; and the fourth brought him to the heart of God.

That is a very good and reliable division of this little book, but it never actually satisfied me, and I have attempted to make an outline of the book without making a comparison with Paul. Very frankly, I had more difficulty outlining the little Book of Jonah than I did the Book of Revelation.

I have another approach to outlining Jonah, and I want to tell you how it came about. Many years ago, I was waiting for the train one night in Nashville, Tennessee. I was returning to seminary, and at that time I was working on outlines for each book of the Bible, for I started early in that type of ministry. But I couldn't figure out an outline for Jonah. When I got to the Union Station in Nashville, I discovered that the train was late and that I would have to wait thirty minutes to an hour. I did what I'm sure you do whenever you must wait in an airport or railroad station. I walked around for quite awhile before I sat down. I walked by the popcorn machine; I walked by the cigar stand (today they call them gift shops); I walked by the soda pop vendor; and I walked by the restaurant that was there. I just kept walking around, and I came to the railroad timetable. As I was looking at the timetable, it occurred to me that the Book of Jonah could be outlined according to a timetable.

Three important things are to be found on a timetable. The first is the time and place that the train or plane is leaving. Second, there is the destination of the train or plane. Finally, you need to know the time it will arrive at its destination. I go to many places today on speaking engagements, and if I fly, there are three things that are important to know: the time I leave, my destination, and the time of my arrival.

Therefore, if we look at the Book of Jonah as a timetable, this becomes my outline for the book:

Leave Destination Arrive

Chapter 1 Israel Nineveh Fish (Samaria or Gath-hepher)

Chapter 2 Fish Nineveh Dry Land

Chapter 3 Dry Land Nineveh Nineveh

Chapter 4 Nineveh Gourd Vine Heart of God

Chapter 1

THEME: Call and commission of Jonah; Jonah goes west; the great wind; Jonah arrives in the fish

Call And Commission Of Jonah (1:1-2)

Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai saying, [[Jonah 1:1](#)].

Jonah is identified for us as a prophet and as the son of Amittai. (See the Introduction for a detailed discussion of the evidence that Jonah was a historical character.)

Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me [[Jonah 1:2](#)].

This is God's call and commission of Jonah to go to Nineveh. The city of Nineveh is called "that great city." It was the capital of the Assyrian Empire and was located on the Tigris River. It was the world power in that day. Later on, we will deal with the matter of the size of the city, because it is emphasized two more times in this book. Here the emphasis is actually upon the wickedness of the city. It is a great city but great in wickedness. Its wickedness is so great that it has come up before God, and He has now determined that He will judge the city -- that is, if the city does not turn to Him.

Jonah Goes West (1:3)

But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD [[Jonah 1:3](#)].

Jonah leaves his hometown of Gath-hepher in the northern kingdom of Israel and, with this call and commission from God, you would think that he plans to head for the city of Nineveh. Jonah would have had to go east from Israel to get to Nineveh. Instead of going in that direction, he does a very strange thing. He goes down to Joppa and buys a ticket on the first boat for Tarshish. Tarshish was a city founded by the Phoenicians on the southern coast of Spain. It was the jumping-off place of the west.

What we have before us is a greater problem than the problem of Jonah in the fish. The problem in the Book of Jonah is not the fish -- it's Jonah. God asks him to go to Nineveh, but he buys a ticket for Tarshish. God tells him to go east -- Jonah decides not to obey God, and he goes west. The question naturally arises: Why did Jonah do this? There are several reasons:

1. Jonah hated the Ninevites, and he did not want them saved. There was a basis for his hatred. Assyria was one of the most brutal nations of the ancient world. They were feared and dreaded by all the peoples of that day. They used very cruel methods of torture and could extract information from their captives very easily. One of the procedures was to take a man out onto the sands of the desert and bury him up to his neck -- nothing but his head would stick out. Then they would put a thong through his tongue and leave him there to die as the hot, penetrating sun would beat down upon his head. It is said that a man would go mad before he died. That was one of the "nice little things" the Assyrians hatched up.

As an army, the Assyrians moved in an unusual manner. One of the reasons the Babylonians were able to overcome them was the slowness of the march of the Assyrian army. They took their families with them and had very little order in the army. They moved as a mob across the countryside. It is very easy to see that their disorder would militate against them. However, when they moved down like a plague of locusts upon a town or village, it is said that they were so feared and dreaded that on some occasions an entire town would commit suicide rather than fall into the hands of the brutal Assyrians. You can see that they were not loved by the peoples round about.

We also know that at this time the Assyrians were making forays into the northern kingdom of Israel. For a long time, it was Syria and the northern kingdom that fought against each other, but they finally came to an alliance because of the threat of Assyria to the north and east of them. However, Assyria eventually took both Syria and Israel into captivity. When the Assyrians were beginning to penetrate into a nation they hoped to conquer, they would make a surprise attack upon a city, take captive the women, and then brutally slay the men and the children. We don't know this for sure, but it is reasonable to conceive that the Assyrians had come down against Jonah's hometown of Gath-hepher at one time. They may have come even to his home, and he may have seen his own father and mother cruelly, brutally slain before his eyes. Or he might have seen his sisters raped by the Assyrians. At least we know that Jonah hated the Assyrians, and he did not want them saved. Therefore, he goes in the opposite direction -- he's not going to carry God's message to them.

2. There is a second reason that Jonah went west. Somebody might point out that Jonah's message was one of salvation. His message was to be one of judgment. Although it is true that it was to be a message of judgment, Jonah knew God, and it was because Jonah knew God that he went in the opposite direction. He knew that if he went to Nineveh with a message of judgment and if the people of the city turned to God in repentance, God would not judge them but would save the city! Jonah didn't want that city saved. It just wasn't something he looked forward to. And so he went in the opposite direction.

3. A third reason that Jonah went in the opposite direction was because he was a disobedient prophet of God -- there is no question about that. He was out of the will of God, very much like the prodigal son. The prodigal son ran away from home. He didn't want to live under the will of his father, and so he went to the far country. Jonah was out of the will of God. He was a prophet who is certainly not in step with God. We will find that the entire fourth chapter deals with his rebellion and how God brought him back into step with Himself.

4. Here is a fourth and final reason that Jonah disobeyed God. Have you ever noticed that in the Old Testament God never sent His messengers as missionaries to other countries? The method that God used in the Old Testament was really the opposite of His method today. Israel was to serve and worship God as a nation that was located at the crossroads of the world, where the three continents of Europe, Asia, and Africa meet. The nations of that day, if they were not traveling by water, would take the route through the land of Israel. God took the people of Israel, put them there at the crossroads, and had them build a temple to worship Him in order that they might witness to God by serving Him. Their

witness was to a world that was looking in on them. The invitation was, "Come, and let us go up to the house of the Lord and worship Him." Israel witnessed by serving God at the crossroads of the world, and the world came to them.

For example, the Queen of Sheba came from the ends of the earth to Israel. Why did she come? She had heard how they worshiped and, when she got there, she found that there was an altar there for sinners. That was the thing which brought her to a saving knowledge of God. If you read the historical record, you will find that not only did she come but also the kings of the earth came to hear the wisdom of Solomon. During that brief period, Israel did witness to the world; they witnessed not by going out as missionaries but by the world coming in to them.

We are given only the one example of the Queen of Sheba in the Old Testament. In the New Testament we have the examples of one son of Ham, one son of Japheth, and one son of Shem who were converted -- the Ethiopian eunuch, Saul of Tarsus, and Cornelius, the Roman centurion. Although we are given only these examples, there were literally thousands and, later, millions who were led to Christ.

However, for the church today the method is the opposite of that in the Old Testament. I think it was rather startling for the twelve disciples, all of whom were Israelites brought up on the Old Testament, when the Lord Jesus said to them, ". . . Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel . . ." ([Mark 16:15](#)). I imagine they looked at each other and said, "My, this is something brand new! We did not know that it was to be done this way." Instead of, "Come up to Jerusalem," the Lord Jesus said, "Beginning at Jerusalem, you are to go now to Judea, Samaria, and on to the ends of the earth" (see [Acts 1:8](#)). That is the method today. We often criticize Israel for their failure, but we build a church on the corner and expect the world to come to us, when instead we are supposed to be going out to the world. It took me years to learn that, but that is why the burden of my ministry today is to get the Word of God out to the world via radio. We believe that this is God's method today.

But that wasn't the method in Jonah's day, and Jonah was surprised when God said to him, "Arise, go to Nineveh." I think Jonah was the same kind of man as Simon Peter, and he probably talked back to the Lord. I think he said, "Wait a minute here! You never sent Elijah down to Egypt, and You never sent Elisha over into India. Why are You asking me to do something You've never asked a prophet to do before?" I have great sympathy for Jonah. He didn't understand why God would want to change His method. However, this book reveals that God is the God of the Gentiles. Paul wrote in [Romans 3:29](#), "Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also." Jonah could say amen to that statement but not at this point in time. It wasn't until after the experiences related in this book that he realized that God is the God of the Gentiles also.

"And he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD." Jonah's experience may be helpful to you if you are having a difficult time and wonder if you are in the will of God. Although I cannot tell you whether or not you are in God's will, I can say this to you: The fact that you are having a difficult time is not a proof that you are out of the will of God. Rather, it may be a proof that you are in the will of God. If you are having it too

easy today and things are breaking just right for you in every direction, and if that is all you are using to interpret that you are in the will of God, then you are leaning on a poor, broken reed, and it will not hold you up in time of a crisis.

Let's look closely at the illustration of Jonah. Here is a man who hears God's call and heads in the opposite direction. He is definitely out of the will of God. He goes down to Joppa, and when he goes down there, he encounters no problems. He finds a ship. He buys a ticket. He gets on board the ship, and he goes to sleep! Everything is lovely.

I'm of the opinion that Jonah could give a testimony, the kind of which I have often heard. Jonah went down to buy the ticket, perhaps wondering if he were in God's will or not. (He should have known he wasn't. But a lot of us say that we wonder whether we are or not.) He was standing in line to buy a ticket, and the ticket agent said to the man right ahead of Jonah, "I'm sorry, but all space is sold." Jonah was about to turn away when the phone rang and the ticket agent answered it. A Mr. Goldberg was calling to say that he was in the hospital, having suddenly taken sick, and he would not be able to make the trip. So Jonah waited, and the ticket agent turned to him and said, "Brother, are you lucky! I've just had a cancellation." Jonah must have thought, I sure feel lucky. I feel more than that -- maybe this means I'm in God's will.

How many Christians think like that today? If they are having a difficult time, they say, "Oh, I am out of the will of God." If things are going easy and everything works out well, they say, "Oh, I must be in the will of God." My friend, I am of the opinion that if you are having problems, it may be that the Devil is getting a little uneasy because you are growing and proving effective for God. I have found this to be true in my own ministry. Just because you are having trouble does not mean you are out of the will of God.

Everything seemed to be propitious for a very pleasant journey for Jonah. Everything had worked out so well. Someone has called this "the fortuitous occurrence of circumstances." But we know that Jonah is going in the wrong direction and that God will have to put him inside a fish in order to turn him around.

God's men down through the centuries, both in the Bible and out of the Bible, have not found the going so easy. It hasn't always been so propitious. Things have been difficult. I have thrilled at the story of David Livingstone, but that man really suffered. If I had been penetrating dark Africa as he did, after a few of the rough experiences that he had, it would have been very easy to say in a very pious voice, "I think it is the will of God for us to turn around and go home." Likewise, John G. Patton, a missionary in the New Hebrides, met disappointment on every hand. He had to overcome handicaps daily, but this is the way God leads.

We read in the Book of Hebrews, "And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth" ([Heb. 11:36-38](#)). We read also in Hebrews that some escaped the edge of the sword by faith, but others by faith were slain by the sword. Therefore, you cannot always interpret the good

circumstances as being God's will and the unfavorable circumstances as not being God's will.

Jonah is on shipboard now; and, as the ship pulls out, I imagine that Jonah stands on the top deck, smiling as the land fades away in the distance. He may be saying to himself, "My, what a beautiful journey this is going to be!" But we will find that this man is not going to have it quite that easy.

The Great Wind (1:4-10)

But the LORD sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken [[Jonah 1:4](#)].

"But the LORD sent out a great wind into the sea." God was responsible for this storm. I call your attention to that at the very beginning. This storm is supernatural.

The storm on the Sea of Galilee, during which our Lord was asleep in the boat, was such that those men on board knew that they were going to perish. They were experienced with that sea and knew that it was a storm which they could not weather and that their boat soon would be at the bottom of the sea. It was a supernatural storm also, but Satan was responsible for that one in an attempt to destroy the Lord Jesus. Peter came to Him and said, ". . . carest thou not that we perish?" ([Mark 4:38](#)) -- for that is what would have happened had He not intervened.

Here in the Book of Jonah, God is using a storm, and He is using it for a good purpose. He is going to save a city with this storm. He is going to turn around a prophet who has been going the wrong way and start him going the right way.

Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god, and cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it of them. But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep [[Jonah 1:5](#)].

These "mariners" are sailors accustomed to the Mediterranean, and they detect that this is no natural storm.

"But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep." I once entertained the popular viewpoint that if a man gets out of the will of God and into sin, he will be tormented with a bad conscience and will simply be in misery. Is that true of Jonah? Jonah is definitely out of the will of God, going the opposite way, actually running away from the presence of God. He wants to get as far from Nineveh as he possibly can, and he is headed for Tarshish. Yet he is confident that everything is all right. He can sleep in this storm when even the sailors are frightened, and these sailors are a bunch of pagans, worshiping all kinds of gods.

So the shipmaster came to him, and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not [[Jonah 1:6](#)].

In effect, the shipmaster says, "You sleepy-head, you! Do you mean that you can sleep in a storm like this?" Jonah could. In fact, he is the only one on board who could sleep! The

shipmaster goes on, "Arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not." So Jonah now comes up on deck, and he sees this great storm they are in which is threatening to send the ship to the bottom.

And they said every one to his fellow, Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us. So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah [[Jonah 1:7](#)].

On other occasions when I have taught the Book of Jonah, some folk have misunderstood me at this point and have thought that I approved of gambling. I hope you will follow me very carefully at this time. I think that gambling is an awful curse. I believe that the use of the lottery and of gambling in order to raise revenue for the government will ultimately corrupt our people and our nation. In the end it will be more destructive than it could possibly be helpful.

Other folk are quick to point out that this was a superstitious thing the sailors were doing, casting lots to see why this evil had come upon them. They cast lots, and it fell on Jonah. Apparently God was in this and used this, but that does not mean that God approved of it.

These sailors cast lots. Can God use something like that? I want to share with you an experience that I had in my first pastorate. The very wonderful pastor whom I followed there told me about a certain family in the church. The wife and the little girl, a beautiful, redheaded little girl, were both believers and attended the church, but the pastor had not been able to reach the father, the head of the home. At Christmastime that year, the father came to church. I whispered to several people to be friendly to him, and they all shook hands with him and greeted him. His criticism was that we overdid it! We were too friendly. So at Eastertime when he again came to church, I simply told the folk that he didn't want us to shake hands with him and be friendly. So they didn't, and I just barely shook his hand at the door. His criticism of the church then was that we were too cold. Now there was a fellow you couldn't please at all! When I went to visit him, he practically ordered me out of the house -- he didn't want me to talk to him about the Lord.

About six months later, as I was getting ready for bed one night -- in fact, I already had on my pajamas -- the doorbell rang. I opened the door, and there stood this man with a very frightened look on his face. I let him in, and we sat down to talk. He told me that he ran a dry cleaning place and had a woman working there for him at the desk as a cashier. One morning she had come to work and told him, "I went to a fortune-teller last night, and the fortune-teller told me that I'm going to die suddenly." Both he and the woman had laughed about it. Then she went on to say, "The fortune-teller also said that the man I am working for is going to die suddenly." They laughed again because they thought it was all preposterous and ridiculous.

But about two days later, as she stepped off the streetcar, that woman was hit by a car and was killed almost instantly. I want to tell you, when he heard it, he really became frightened. It was the very night when he came and knocked on my door. He said to me, "I must be next."

I told him, "Well, I think I can relieve your fear there. The fortune-teller had nothing in the world to do with her death -- she had no prior knowledge of it. This is just one of

those strange circumstances of life which we call a coincidence. This doesn't mean that you will die."

He said, "But I want to be prepared. Would you explain to me the plan of salvation?" I got down on the floor in my pajamas, with some wrapping paper and a piece of crayon, and I outlined the plan of salvation for him. I explained to him how God had sent Christ into the world to die for our sins. That man was ready that night, and he accepted Christ as his Savior.

I have always thought that the Devil had pushed that fellow a little too far, because he was responsible for the man getting saved. Very frankly, God can use things like that. He says that He will make the wrath of man to praise Him, and He can also make the superstition of man to praise Him.

Those sailors on board with Jonah were superstitious fellows. God used their superstition. They cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah. Notice what happens --

Then said they unto him, Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil is upon us; What is thine occupation? and whence comest thou? what is thy country? and of what people art thou? [[Jonah 1:8](#)].

Jonah apparently has had some time to talk to these sailors, but he hasn't told them much about himself. He certainly is no witness for God. A man out of the will of God can never be an effective witness for God. That is something very important for us to keep in mind.

Notice what Jonah did not tell them. First of all they say to him, "We want to ask you some questions since this evil has fallen on us. What is thine occupation?" Jonah hasn't told anybody he is a prophet; he's kept quiet on that. "And whence comest thou?" Jonah hasn't told them he is from Gath-hepher in the northern kingdom of Israel. He hasn't said anything about his hometown. "What is thy country?" He hasn't said that he is a citizen of Israel. "And of what people art thou?" He hasn't said that he belongs to the Israelite people who have a revelation of the living and true God. He hasn't explained that he is a prophet who represents the living God and who has been called to go to Nineveh to bring a message of hope and salvation. Jonah hasn't said any of that. Why? He is entirely out of the will of God.

And he said unto them, I am an Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land [[Jonah 1:9](#)].

"I am an Hebrew" -- that meant a lot. The Hebrews were known to be monotheistic; that is, they worshiped one God, never an idol. They had no other gods before them but worshiped the God who is the Creator. Jonah says, "I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land." Jonah tells them that he worships the God who made the ocean which they could see right before them being so stirred up by the storm. He made the sea, and He made the dry land also. I think these sailors knew about Israel, but they were pagan and had no knowledge of the living and true God.

Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him, Why hast thou done this? For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them [[Jonah 1:10](#)].

Although he could sleep with it very nicely, without question Jonah had a bad conscience. Jonah tells the sailors, "The reason I am taking this trip is for a pleasure trip. Actually, I had business over in Nineveh, but I decided not to go over there. I know that I am getting away from my God in making this trip." But Jonah hasn't divulged too much information to them.

These men say to Jonah, "Why hast thou done this?" May I say to you, that is the good question that the unbeliever sometimes asks of the believer -- and can be an embarrassing one.

When I was a pastor of a church in Los Angeles, an unsaved man who had visited the church came to see me. I had met him before in a business in downtown Los Angeles and had invited him to come to church. He said to me, "Is So-and-so a member of your church?" I said, "Yes, and he's an officer in the church." He said, "I've known that man for several years, and I've done business with him. I never would have dreamed that he is a Christian. If I were a Christian, I would not do the things that man does." You know, it's embarrassing when an unbeliever says to a Christian, "Why are you doing this? I thought you were a child of God." I think Jonah must have turned three or four different shades of red at this particular time.

Jonah Arrives In The Fish (1:11-17)

Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous [[Jonah 1:11](#)].

These men recognize that they are up against a very hard decision, and they want Jonah to make that decision. They ask him, "What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us?" And Jonah gives them a very straightforward answer --

And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you [[Jonah 1:12](#)].

Jonah recognizes that the hand of God is in all of this and that God is moving in his life at this time. He knows that the only solution to the problem of the storm is to get him off the ship going to Tarshish. God has determined that this man is not going to Tarshish but to the place where He wants him to go.

Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring it to the land; but they could not: for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous against them [[Jonah 1:13](#)].

These pagan sailors certainly stand in a good light at this point. Although they are pagan and heathen, they do not want to throw him overboard. They try their best to get the ship out of the storm. They row as hard as they can to bring the ship to land, but they cannot do it. At this particular point in the book, these pagan sailors stand in a better light than Jonah does and prove to be rather outstanding men.

Wherefore they cried unto the LORD, and said, We beseech thee, O LORD, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for thou, O LORD, hast done as it pleased thee [[Jonah 1:14](#)].

Notice the change that is taking place in these men's lives. They are turning now to the living and true God. Of course, they are turning in their desperation. They call upon God to forgive them for what they are going to do, because they have no other alternative.

So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging [[Jonah 1:15](#)].

This reveals very definitely that it was a supernatural storm under God's control.

The the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the LORD, and made vows [[Jonah 1:16](#)].

The fear of the Lord, we are told in Scripture, is the beginning of wisdom. "Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly." Did they fear their god? No. They feared the one who is the Creator of the sea and of the land.

"And offered a sacrifice unto the LORD." That sacrifice points to Jesus Christ -- there is no alternative.

"And made vows." What vows do these men make? They vow to the Lord that they will now serve Him. Through this experience, they now turn to the living and true God. So something good is accomplished by the storm, by Jonah's being on board the ship, and by his being cast overboard.

Notice now what happens to Jonah --

Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights [[Jonah 1:17](#)].

The Greek word translated as "whale" in [Matthew 12:40](#) is kktos, meaning "a huge fish." It is called here "a great fish." I do not think it was a whale, but the thing that is important is the fact that the fish was prepared by the Lord for this special event. I am of the opinion that we have a miracle in this fish in the sense that it was a specially prepared fish to swallow up Jonah.

"And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights." Notice that it does not say that Jonah was alive inside the fish.

A review of my timetable for the Book of Jonah shows that in chapter 1 Jonah leaves Israel, his destination is Nineveh, but he arrives in the fish.

Chapter 2

THEME: When did Jonah pray? Jonah's prayer; Jonah arrives on the dry land

Our timetable for chapter 2 tells us that Jonah is going to leave the fish, his destination is still Nineveh, and he will arrive on the dry land. First, however, we want to examine the experience of this man inside the fish.

Why Did Jonah Pray? (2:1)

Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly
[\[Jonah 2:1\]](#).

Immediately someone is going to say to me, "You believe that Jonah was dead inside the fish and that God raised him from the dead, but it says here that Jonah prayed unto the Lord God out of the fish's belly -- that means he was alive inside the fish." That is true, but my question is: When did Jonah pray this prayer? Did he pray this prayer when he first got into the fish? Or, when Jonah found himself inside the fish, did he say to himself, "My, I am really here in a precarious position, and things sure don't look good for me. I want to prepare a prayer to send to God that He'll hear and answer"? Did he decide to write out his prayer, work on it for a couple of days, memorize it, and then on the third day say the prayer to God? If Jonah did that, then my interpretation of this is all wrong -- I'm all wet, if you please. But if I know human nature at all, Jonah didn't wait very long to pray this prayer. When he found himself in this condition, you can be sure of one thing: he immediately went to prayer before God. In fact, I think he prayed on the way down, and by the time he got into the fish's tummy, it was time to say amen.

Men don't pray a prepared prayer in time of crisis. They get down to business immediately when the crisis comes. I am reminded of a friend of mine in the ministry who lost the index finger on his right hand below the first joint -- there was nothing left but a stub. When anyone would ask him how he was called to the ministry, he would hold up that little stub of a finger and wiggle it, and then he would tell his story.

When he was a boy, an evangelist came to their church to hold meetings. The first night of the meetings, his dad, who was an officer in the church, made him sit on the front row, and the preacher really made that seat hot for him. He knew the preacher was talking right to him, although the preacher himself didn't realize it. His dad made him go to the meeting the second night, and he knew that if he went yet another time, he not only would accept Christ as his Savior but would also give his life to enter the ministry. He had a feeling even at that time that that would be his call. So that night after everybody went to bed, he got an extra shirt and his pajamas and ran off to Mississippi. There he got a job in a sawmill. I don't know if you are acquainted with the old-time sawmill. A man would take a great hook and would roll the logs over onto the carriage which would take the log on down to the big saw. The saw would then rip that log right down through the middle. My friend's job was to roll the logs onto the carriage.

One afternoon after he had worked there for about two weeks, he ran out of logs. So the foreman got some old logs which had not been run through the saw for one reason or another. There was one log among them that had already been ripped about halfway. For some reason they hadn't finished it but had pulled it back out. When my friend rolled that particular log over onto the carriage which carried it into the band saw, the place where the log had previously been ripped opened up, and the index finger on his right hand got caught in it. He felt himself being pulled along the carriage toward that big band saw. He

began to yell at the top of his voice, but by that time, the other end of the log had hit the saw and was already going through. If you have ever been around a sawmill, you know that that makes a terrible racket -- nobody could hear him. He was yelling at the top of his voice, very frightened as he found himself being pulled against his will right into that saw.

It would take only about forty-five seconds for him to get to the saw. His finger was way out in front of him, and the place where the log had been sawed was clamped down tight on it. His finger hit the saw and was cut off. But that released him, and he rolled to the side and was safe. In that forty-five seconds, he had prayed to the Lord. He accepted Christ as his Savior, promised the Lord he would go into the ministry and do His will, and told Him a lot of other things also! My preacher friend used to say that he told the Lord more in that forty-five seconds than he has ever told Him in an hour's prayer since then.

May I say to you, he prayed that prayer immediately when the crisis came. That's when I pray; that's when you pray. You don't wait to pray in a time of emergency. I recall one time on a plane when we got into unusually rough weather -- I don't like flying even in good weather, and this rough weather was terrific. The minute the plane began to drop -- it seemed to me like it was never going to quit dropping! -- I began to pray. I didn't say, "I'm going to wait until we are off the plane, I'm going to wait until we get out of this storm before I pray." I began to pray right there and then. I'm sure that's what you do, and I'm almost sure that's what Jonah did, also.

So Jonah prayed this prayer as he went down from the mouth of the fish and through the esophagus. By the time, he went "kerplunk" into the fish's tummy, this man Jonah had already completed his prayer and had said amen. I think he prayed a great deal more than is recorded here -- I think we have "the abridged edition" of it.

Some folk put a great deal of emphasis upon the time word then -- "Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly." They assume that this means that after he had been in the fish three days and three nights, then he prayed. This is not what it means at all. It is characteristic of the Hebrew language to give the full account of something and then to go back and emphasize that which is important. This same technique is used in Genesis concerning the creation. We are given the six days of creation, and then God goes back and gives a detailed account of the creation of man, adding a great deal. To attempt to build an assumption on the little word then is very fallacious. It simply means that now Jonah is going to tell us the story in detail; he is going to tell us what really happened inside the fish.

Jonah's Prayer (2:2-9)

And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice [[Jonah 2:2](#)].

"I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me." Notice first that God heard Jonah's prayer.

"Out of the belly of hell cried I." The New Scofield Reference Bible translates this as "out of the belly of sheol," and that certainly is accurate for that is the original Hebrew word. Sheol is sometimes translated in Scripture by the word "grave" and in other places as "the unseen world," meaning where the dead go. This is a word that, any way you look at it, has to do with death. It is a word that always goes to the cemetery, and you cannot take it anywhere else. Therefore, my interpretation of what Jonah is saying is that the belly of the fish was his grave, and a grave is a place for the dead -- you do not put a live man in a grave. Jonah recognized that he was going to die inside the fish and that God would hear him and raise him from the dead.

Many years ago when I was still a young seminary student, I was asked to preach for a brief period of time at the Westminster Presbyterian Church in Atlanta, Georgia. I made the Sunday evening service an evangelistic service. One night several young people came forward when I gave the invitation. After the service I talked to them, and then I went to the rear of the church. A young fellow was standing there, and he told me, "I'm a student at Georgia Tech, and I would like to accept Christ, but I have a hurdle, a problem that I can't overcome." I asked him what his problem was, and he replied, "I just can't believe that a man could live three days and three nights inside a fish."

I said, "Who told you that?"

"Well," he said, "I thought the Bible said so, and I know I've heard preachers say so. And I've got a professor at school who spends his time ridiculing that."

"My Bible doesn't say that Jonah was alive inside the fish," I told him. Then I opened my Bible to the second chapter of Jonah and said, "To begin with, this man Jonah makes it very clear that the belly of the fish was his grave. A grave is a place for the dead."

"Do you mean that he died? Then that means that God raised him from the dead!" the young man said. I told him he was exactly right -- that is exactly what happened. He said, "That's a greater miracle than Jonah's being kept alive in the fish for three days." I agreed with him that it was a greater miracle because, as we shall see, we have records of other men who have lived through such experiences.

The important thing to note here is the Jonah cried unto the Lord out of the fish's belly, out of the belly of hell, out of the belly of sheol, out of the belly of the grave -- and that is the place for the dead. Jonah felt like he was there to die and that he was in his grave. You must remember that he did not write this account while he was inside the fish but afterward.

I realize there are those who will not accept my viewpoint concerning this. When I wrote my first booklet on it, I felt very much alone. However, when the late Dr. M. R. DeHaan also took this viewpoint, many folk accepted it because of their confidence in him.

If you hold the other viewpoint that Jonah was alive, that's all right. God certainly could have kept Jonah alive. But, my friend, don't hold that viewpoint to the extent that you prevent a lot of young people from defending the Bible. This young man from Georgia Tech went back to college, and when his professor again brought up the subject of Jonah, he said to the professor, "Who told you that Jonah was alive inside the fish?" The

professor said, "The Bible says so." This young fellow said to him, "Not my Bible." When they got out a Bible (which they had trouble finding) and looked at the Scripture, they found that it does not say that Jonah was alive inside the fish.

I want to share with you a letter that came to me from Austin, Texas, and which reveals the popular interpretation of the Book of Jonah:

Thank you for responding to my letter concerning Jonah. It is a mark of your dedication that you take time to answer such letters, since I am sure you get many. I believe you are doing a fine work for the Lord, and in listening to you over the years, I think you are not getting older but getting better.

(May I say to you, I'm getting older, but no one's kidding me, I'm not getting better!) The letter continues:

Your story about your fear of flying and how you conquered it brings meaning to a living faith, but as far as Jonah goes, you are, I believe, putting in a private interpretation. You're straining the Word to make it say something it doesn't say. May I go on to say that the fact that Jonah lived three days in the whale's belly doesn't do any damage to the reference in [Matthew 12:39-40](#).

Why don't you take your Bible and read it again? If we forget the chapter designation, it helps. "And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. Then Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God out of the fish's belly." I guess that Jonah did a lot of soul-searching during those three days. If you interpret this passage like you do, you must believe the writer didn't have enough sense to put the story down in the sequence it occurred.

. . . You state that it assumed that Jonah was alive. Well, I don't believe it is, but if you want to say that, I think your assumption [that he was dead] is the greater assumption, and I hope you realize you are only assuming. My question to you is: Why?

I appreciate that letter, and I recognize that the general and popular interpretation is that Jonah was alive for three days and three nights inside the fish, that he apparently had a very comfortable weekend inside a "fish-tel" instead of a motel. I don't think he could have been as comfortable as he would have been in a Holiday Inn, a Ramada Inn, or a Hilton Hotel, but at least it is popularly believed that he spent three days and three nights in there alive. In fact, when I was a boy in Sunday school, I was given a little card on which Jonah was shown inside the fish, sitting at a table! I don't know where that came from, but that was the way he was pictured and, although I was just a little fellow, it rather disturbed me.

If you hold the viewpoint that Jonah was alive, you are with the majority today, even with the majority of the expositors of the Book of Jonah. You can feel comfortable in being with the majority, but of course, if you want to be right, you'll want to go along with me, I'm sure. I say this facetiously, of course.

However, I want to make this point very carefully and very seriously. It is not a question of whether God was able to keep Jonah alive inside the fish or not. God could keep him alive. The question is: Did God keep him alive? Was the miracle one of keeping him

alive, or was the miracle in raising him from the dead? Since this book illustrates resurrection, I'm of the opinion that God raised him from the dead.

If, after I have had a little talk with Jonah in heaven, I learn that he was alive for three days and three nights inside that fish, then you can come by and say, "I told you so." Then I will have to confess that I was wrong. I am not, however, as the writer of this letter seems to think, taking an assumption and making a dogmatic statement.

I do want to say that I have had the privilege of teaching the Book of Jonah on quite a few college campuses, and I have found that the position I take does give ammunition to young people today. If you want to hold to the opposite viewpoint, don't get enraged and become irritated with my viewpoint, for you must recognize that it has been very helpful to a great many students. It has been the means, as in the case of the Georgia Tech student years ago, of bringing some to a saving knowledge of Christ.

It is also not a question of whether a man can live in a fish. Men have been swallowed by a fish or by a whale and have lived to tell the story. There have been recorded some remarkable stories. So that leads me to say that, if you believe Jonah was alive inside the fish, that is not too great a miracle because other men have had the same experience.

Many years ago here in Pasadena, California, there was a very excellent Bible teacher by the name of Miss Grace W. Kellogg. She gave me a copy of her little book, *The Bible Today*. She held the old viewpoint that Jonah was alive inside the fish, and she wanted me to see that Jonah could have been alive. Of course, I agree that he could have been alive, and if that is what Jonah means to have said, then I have really misunderstood him. Nonetheless, I would like to give you a quotation from Miss Kellogg's book which shows that it is possible for a man to be swallowed by a fish and live. There are many examples of it, and I am going to give you a few of those that she gave:

There are at least two known monsters of the deep who could easily have swallowed Jonah. They are the *Balaenoptera Musculus* or sulphur-bottom whale, and the *Rhinodon Typicus* or whale shark. Neither of these monsters of the deep have any teeth. They feed in an interesting way by opening their enormous mouths, submerging their lower jaw, and rushing through the water at terrific speed. After straining out the water, they swallow whatever is left. A sulphur-bottom whale, one hundred feet long, was captured off Cape Cod in 1933. His mouth was ten or twelve feet wide -- so big he could easily have swallowed a horse. These whales have four to six compartments in their stomachs, in any one of which a colony of men could find free lodging. They might even have a choice of rooms, for in the head of this whale is a wonderful air storage chamber, an enlargement of the nasal sinus, often measuring seven feet high, seven feet wide, by fourteen feet long. If he has an unwelcome guest on board who gives him a headache, the whale swims to the nearest land and gets rid of the offender as he did Jonah.

The Cleveland Plain Dealer recently quoted an article by Dr. Ransome Harvey who said that a dog was lost overboard from a ship. It was found in the head of a whale six days later, alive and barking.

Frank Bullen, F.R.G.S., who wrote, "The Cruise of the Cathalot," tells of a shark fifteen feet in length which was found in the stomach of a whale. He says that when dying the whale ejects the contents of its stomach.

The late Dr. Dixon stated that in a museum in Beirut, Lebanon, there is a head of a whale shark big enough to swallow the largest man that history records! He also tells of a white shark of the Mediterranean which swallowed a whole horse; another swallowed a reindeer minus only its horns. In still another Mediterranean white shark was found a whole sea cow, about the size of an ox.

These facts show that Jonah could have been swallowed by either a whale or a shark. But has any other man besides Jonah been swallowed and lived to tell the tale? We know two such instances.

The famous French scientist, M. de Parville, writes of James Bartley, who in the region of the Falkland Islands near South America, was supposed to have been drowned at sea. Two days after his disappearance, the sailors made a catch of a whale. When it was cut up, much to their surprise they found their missing friend alive but unconscious inside the whale. He revived and has been enjoying the best of health ever since his adventure.

Dr. Harry Rimmer, President of the Research Science Bureau of Los Angeles, writes of another case. "In the Literary Digest we noticed an account of an English sailor who was swallowed by a gigantic Rhinodon in the English Channel. Briefly, the account stated that in the attempt to harpoon one of these monstrous sharks, this sailor fell overboard, and before he could be picked up again, the shark turned and engulfed him. Forty-eight hours after the accident occurred, the fish was sighted and slain. When the shark was opened by the sailors, they were amazed to find the man unconscious but alive! He was rushed to the hospital where he was found to be suffering from shock alone, and a few hours later was discharged as being physically fit. The account concluded by saying that the man was on exhibit in a London Museum at a shilling admittance fee; being advertised as 'The Jonah of the Twentieth Century.' "

In 1926 Dr. Rimmer met this man, and writes that his physical appearance was odd; his body was devoid of hair and patches of yellowish-brown color covered his entire skin.

If two men could exist for two days and nights inside of marine monsters, could not a prophet of God, under His direct care and protection, stand the experience a day and night longer -- so why should we doubt God's Word?

This demonstrates the fact that a man could live in a fish, but it also takes away from the unusual character of Jonah's experience; that is, if these men lived and Jonah lived -- and I am told there are even other records of such experiences -- then what you have in the Book of Jonah is a record of something that is not really a great miracle. You simply have a record of an unusual incident that took place. I personally believe that the greater miracle is the fact that God raised him from the dead.

Again, I remind you that the question before us is not whether God could make a man live for three days, and three nights inside a fish; the question is: Did God do that? Is that what the record says?

For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me [[Jonah 2:3](#)].

We cannot treat this lightly. If Jonah lived in the fish, he also lived like a fish, because he was swamped by water. He says, "The floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me." In other words, Jonah is saying, "I got wet." I think it is all wet to try to say that the man lived three days and three nights. I personally feel that the Devil gets us to argue about that, while we miss the great truth of the resurrection.

Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple [[Jonah 2:4](#)].

"Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight" -- Jonah is speaking of death. "Yet I will look again toward thy holy temple." Jonah believed that he would be raised from the dead. He had been brought up on the Old Testament, and I think that Jonah was one of the many in the northern kingdom who faithfully went down to Jerusalem to worship in the temple. The Israelites knew that Solomon's temple was the place to worship the living and true God. Jonah says, "I'm going to look again toward thy holy temple. God will raise me up again."

Does this sound to you like a man who is alive? --

The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head [[Jonah 2:5](#)].

"The waters compassed me about, even to the soul." He's saying, "I got drenched. The depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head." This sea monster had been eating a bunch of seaweeds. Some seaweeds that I have pulled out along the Pacific Coast are twenty-five feet long -- and this monster had his tummy full of them! Jonah says, "I was down there, and I got these things all wrapped around my head." Do you think this man is describing a very pleasant weekend inside a fish? I don't think so -- I think he is trying to tell us that he went down to the very depths and that he died.

I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever: yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my God [[Jonah 2:6](#)].

"I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever." This is a very interesting translation because it is in Elizabethan English; this is the way that death was spoken of. "The earth with her bars was about me for ever" -- Jonah is speaking here of the bars of death, and that is the meaning of this translation.

"Yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my God." "Corruption" is death. The apostle Peter so used this word on the Day of Pentecost when he said that the Lord Jesus did not see corruption (see [Acts 2:25-31](#)). The miracle about the Lord Jesus is that when He died He did not see corruption -- His body did not corrupt. That is the difference between Jonah's experience and our Lord's experience. Jonah did see corruption. His body apparently began to decay in those three days and three nights. "Yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption." What we have here, in my judgment, is a

definite statement by Jonah that he died. The miracle here is resurrection, and that is a much greater miracle than for a man to live for three days inside a fish.

I think it is very important that we have a book in the Old Testament which teaches the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Resurrection is one of the two pillars of our salvation upon which the ark of the church rests -- the death of Christ and the resurrection of Christ. They are both taught in the Old Testament, and this book illustrates His resurrection.

When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple [[Jonah 2:7](#)].

I think a normal explanation of this would be that when this man was swallowed by the fish, he was frightened. He began immediately to call out to God to deliver him as he found himself going down the esophagus of that fish.

"My soul fainted within me." It must have been at least five minutes before Jonah lapsed into unconsciousness, but before he did, he said, "I remembered the LORD." This is when he prayed his prayer. Don't try to tell me that he prayed his prayer on the third day, after he'd spent three days in their under conviction and soul-searching! Jonah has said that his soul got wet, and now he says that his soul fainted with him -- that means he lost consciousness inside the fish.

"And my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple." Before he lapsed into unconsciousness and before death came to him, this man had already prayed his prayer.

Jonah now makes an observation here, and it is one of the many maxims that you find in the Word of God --

They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy [[Jonah 2:8](#)].

I have tried to arrive at a satisfactory explanation of this verse, and so far I have been unable to do so. However, I will have to give you the explanation I have: This is another of the great principles in Scripture. Vanity is emptiness. Jonah is speaking here of those who observe that which is empty, that which is vain, that which is just a dream and is not going to come to pass. Jonah calls it a lying emptiness. He says that they forsake the only mercy they can receive. Jonah says at this time, "I called out to the living and true God. I no longer was playing the pouting prophet, rushing off to Tarshish in the opposite direction because I hated the Ninevites and didn't want them saved. Now I am dealing with reality. I'm getting right down to the nitty-gritty." (And, my friend, there was a whole lot of nitty-gritty inside that fish!) This man says, "I'm getting right down to business with God. I appealed to Him, to His mercy, and I found that He was merciful to me."

Jonah cried out to God, and now he shows his gratitude by saying this:

But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD [[Jonah 2:9](#)].

"But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving." Friend, I don't suppose you and I can possibly conceive of the thanksgiving that was in this man's heart and life when the fish vomited him out onto the dry land. He was a mess at that time, but he lifted his voice in thanksgiving to God for having delivered him and raised him from the dead.

"I will pay that that I have vowed." Do you know what Jonah's vow was? Can't you imagine what it was? I believe that he now says to the Lord, "I'll go to Nineveh." Before he had said, "I won't go to Nineveh." But he's changed his mind -- God has changed it for him -- and now he makes a vow that he will go to Nineveh.

The Lord has to deal with many of us like that. He has never put me through a fish, but He did give me cancer. Don't misunderstand me, I'm not blaming Him for that -- He was judging me. He has also chastised me since then, because I thought that I had learned all the lessons an old man ought to learn, but I found out that I hadn't learned them. I am prepared to say the same thing Jonah said. I am thankful to Him for the trials He has permitted to come to me and for His deliverance from them. I've made vows to God; I've promised Him that I would devote the rest of my life to giving out His Word -- that is what He has called me to do. Many people find fault and do not like the way I do it -- I'm not entirely satisfied myself; I wish I could do it better -- but I've made a vow to God, and I understand the vow this man Jonah made. He said, "I'm going to Nineveh, Lord, and I'm going to do what You want me to do."

"Salvation is of the LORD." In my judgment this is the most important statement that we find in the Book of Jonah. I think it is very, very important. Notice what he says: "I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD" -- he is speaking of deliverance.

There are several things about this that we need to note. Salvation is God's work for us. Salvation is never man's work for God. God cannot save us by our works, because the only thing that we can present to Him is imperfection, and God simply does not accept imperfection. However, we are unable to present perfection to Him. If it depended on us or our works, if it depended on our doing something, we could never be saved. To begin with, we are lost sinners, dead in trespasses and sins. If deliverance is to come, it will have to come to us like it did to Jonah, who was dead and hopeless in that fish. If he is to live, if he is to be used of God (and he is going to be used), it will be because "Salvation is of the LORD." And if you ever get saved, it is because salvation is of the Lord.

Salvation is such a wonderful thing that you can put it into three tenses: I have been saved -- past tense; I am being saved -- present tense; I shall be saved -- future tense. So salvation is God's work from beginning to end. Let's look for a moment at what Scripture has to say about this.

1. I have been saved -- past tense. The Lord Jesus Christ said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life . . ." ([John 5:24](#)). The moment you trust Christ you have everlasting life. That is something that took place in the past for those who are Christians today. If sometime in the past you trusted Christ, that was all His work -- you trusted what He did. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life . . ." ([John 3:36](#)). You received life when you trusted Christ. You did nothing, nothing whatsoever -- He offered it to you as a gift. ". . . the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" ([Rom. 6:23](#)). I have been saved. How was I

saved? By trusting Christ and His work. It was "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost" ([Titus 3:5](#)).

2. I am being saved -- present tense. God is not through with us; He intends to continue to work in our lives. We are told ". . . work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" ([Phil. 2:12-13](#)). You can't work it out until God has worked it in. Paul could say, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" ([Eph. 2:8-9](#)). That's great, but the apostle didn't stop there; he went on to say, "For we are his workmanship . . ." ([Eph. 2:10](#)). His workmanship? Yes. "Created in Christ Jesus" -- we were given a new life; Paul adds, "Created in Christ Jesus unto good works." So that now by the power of the Holy Spirit, the child of God is to produce fruit. The Lord Jesus said that He wanted us to bring forth much fruit (see [John 15:1-5](#)). Paul writes in Galatians, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law" ([Gal. 5:22-23](#)). All of these marvelous, wonderful graces are His work, and He wants to work them in you today.

You and I ought to be growing in grace and in the knowledge of Christ. I am being saved -- I ought to be a better Christian today than I was last year. I get a little discouraged in that connection, because sometimes I feel that I'm like the proverbial cat which climbed up three feet on the pole in the daytime but slipped back five feet at night! I feel like I haven't gotten very far, but nevertheless, there has been some growth. Don't be satisfied with me, because He is not through with me yet. "Salvation is of the LORD."

3. I will be saved -- future tense. There is coming a day when I will be saved. Paul said to that young preacher, Timothy, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" ([2Tim. 3:16](#)). As Paul talked to him about the wonderful Word of God, he also said, ". . . from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation . . ." ([2Tim. 3:15](#)). Since Timothy was already saved, what did Paul mean when he said, "which are able to make thee wise unto salvation"? He meant that the Scriptures would enable Timothy to grow and enable him to live for God.

But even when we come to the end of life, we are not complete. Dwight L. Moody, the great evangelist, used to tell about the time when he heard Henry Varley, then an unknown preacher. As Moody sat in the balcony, he heard Varley say, "The world has yet to see what God can do with a man who is fully yielded to Him." Dwight L. Moody, just a young fellow at that time, said to himself, "By the grace of God, I will be that man." But when he was dying, Moody said, "I wanted to be that man, but it is still true that the world has yet to see what God can do with a man who is fully yielded to Him." My friend, I am of the opinion that when you and I get to the end of our lives, the same will be true of you and me. It can still be said that the world has yet to see a person completely yielded to God.

So don't be discouraged with me, and I won't be discouraged with you, because, beloved, ". . . it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we

shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" ([1John 3:2](#)). We are going to see Him some day, and then we are going to be like Him. Until then, I'll probably be very unlike Him. Maybe you will make it; I don't think I will. But in that day, I will be like Him, and at that time you are going to be delighted with me, and you are really going to love me. That is one thing that will make heaven so wonderful. Not only am I going to love everybody, but everybody is going to love me! When we get to heaven, we are going to be like Him.

"Salvation is of the LORD." This is a wonderful statement, and it is found in the Old Testament in the Book of Jonah. Do you know where this man learned that? He learned that when he was swallowed by a fish and then vomited out -- then he was able to make this statement.

Jonah Arrives On The Dry Land (2:10)

And the LORD spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land [[Jonah 2:10](#)].

I cannot resist making this corny statement: It just goes to show that you can't keep a good man down! Someone else has put it like this, "Even a fish couldn't digest Jonah, the backsliding prophet." But Jonah is a different man now. He's made some vows to God, and one of them is that he is going to Nineveh. His ticket is now to Nineveh.

Chapter 3

THEME: The God of the second chance; Jonah arrives in Nineveh; Nineveh believes God; Nineveh is not destroyed

Our timetable for the Book of Jonah tells us that all along Jonah's destination has been the city of Nineveh. As we come to chapter 3, his destination is still Nineveh, he leaves the dry land, and he is going to arrive in Nineveh! It has taken him three chapters, and he has had to detour through a fish, but he finally makes it. The turning around place for him was that fish -- it turned him around and headed him in the right direction.

I would like to write over this third chapter the words of the Lord Jesus in His day: "For as Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevite, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation" ([Luke 11:30](#)).

The God Of The Second Chance (3:1)

And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time, saying [[Jonah 3:1](#)].

"The word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time." I was speaking on the Book of Jonah many years ago at a summer conference, and there was a school teacher attending the meetings. She was a lovely person, but after every session, she would come to me with a question. (School teachers always could ask me questions that I couldn't answer!) One day she asked me this question: "Suppose that after Jonah got out of the fish, he went back to Joppa and bought another ticket to go to Tarshish. What would have happened?" I had never been asked that question before, but I told her -- and I still believe it -- that there would have been a second fish out there waiting for him. But that

wasn't necessary because Jonah had already learned his lesson. Now he was going to Nineveh -- there's no question about that -- he was headed for Nineveh.

I think the same thing could be said of the prodigal son. Suppose that the next year that boy had said, "Dad, stake me again. I'm going to the far country." Do you think the father would have staked him? I think he would have. The interesting thing is that the boy didn't go to the far country. Why? Because he is a son of the father, and he didn't want to get into the pigpen again. God's children may get into sin, but they surely are not going to live in sin. Pigs live in pigpens, and sons live in the father's house. It is just that simple and just that important.

"And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time." Our God is the God of the second chance -- what a marvelous, wonderful thing that is! God will give you a second chance, and He will give you more than that. I know that He has given me a dozen different chances. He is long-suffering and patient. He is not willing that any should perish. If you are His child, He is going to hold on to you -- you may be sure of that.

Jonah now gets the call from God a second time. I do not believe that the great corporations of our day would give a man a second chance. General Motors or Standard Oil or General Foods -- I have a notion that they would not give a man a second chance. Years ago here in California I became acquainted with a man who was the first vice-president of the Bank of America, which is a tremendous banking corporation. He is a very wonderful Christian and a personal friend of mine. I asked him one time, "Suppose that in one of the branches of your bank the manager absconded with all the funds, disappeared down to South America somewhere, and then, after a few years, came back and asked to be forgiven and given another chance. Would you give him a job?" He replied, "No. He's through." Such a man would not be given another chance. Isn't it wonderful that God gives us a second chance?

This is not something unusual that God did just in Jonah's case. God is not making an exception with Jonah. Remember the story of Jacob way back in the Book of Genesis? Jacob failed again and again and again and again until he actually became a disgrace to God and a source of embarrassment to Him. But God never let him go. Jacob was a trickster. He was clever. He tried to live by his own ability even when he went down to live with his Uncle Laban. Laban was smarter than Jacob and put it over on him, but Jacob did what he could, and he did pretty well. In the end, Jacob had to flee from Laban and get out of the country. He had antagonized both his father-in-law and his brother, Esau, because of his conduct. But he could not keep on like that because he was God's man. He did want to serve God, but what a poor showing he made of it. As far as I'm concerned, I would have gotten rid of him and would have gotten someone else if I had been the Lord, but God didn't do that.

At Peniel, when Jacob came back to the land, God wrestled with him one night. Sometimes it is said that Jacob wrestled with God. Jacob didn't wrestle with God, my friend. With his father-in-law behind him and his brother ahead of him, both of them wishing Jacob dead, you may be sure of one thing: Jacob was not looking for another wrestling match! He had enough problems on his hands, and he was not about to do any

wrestling. It was God who wrestled with him at Peniel. That man had to learn something that night. God crippled him before He got him, but when Jacob saw that he was losing, he finally just held on and asked for a blessing.

From that day on, Jacob was a different man. He was changed, as we can see down there in Egypt when he met his grandchildren, Joseph's sons. I'm a grandfather, and I know that a grandpa is inclined to boast just a little; you would like your grandsons to think well of you. But old Jacob didn't tell his grandsons how smart he was or how clever he was, how he put it over on Esau or how he put it over on his father-in-law Laban. This is what he did say: "May the Lord, who kept me from evil, keep the lads" (see [Gen. 48:16](#)). What a change had come over him! How humble he was. He was now resting in God, and he was a different man.

Then there is the story of David. Even today there are a great many folk who like to criticize David. One evil old man came to me with a leer in his eyes and a sneer in his voice, and he said to me, "Why did God say that David was a man after His own heart?"

I asked him, "Are you trying to stay that it was because David committed murder and adultery that God said that about him? Is that what you are trying to say?" "Well, it certainly looks that way," he said.

That man simply hadn't read the record at all. It is true that David committed an awful sin, but God punished him for it. God took him to the woodshed and whipped him within an inch of his life. Finally his heart was broken when his son Absalom was slain. That was the boy he had wanted to be king, but Absalom betrayed him. He led a rebellion against David and was murdered. How David wept! He cried, "Oh, Absalom, my son, Absalom; would to God that I had died in your stead!" (see [2Sam. 18:33](#)). David feared that Absalom did not know God, and so he was heartbroken the rest of his life. God punished David because of his sin, but God forgave David when he came to Him and said, "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation . . ." ([Ps. 51:12](#)).

I went on to tell that old man who had come to me, "You know, you ought to be very glad that God said David was a man after His own heart because of his relationship with God. If God would save a man like David, He might save you, and He might save me. You ought to be thankful He's that kind of a God. He gave David a second chance, and He will give you a second and a third chance."

Simon Peter also stumbled and fell and got himself dirty. He denied Christ, and when he looked through that judgment hall, he caught the eyes of the Lord. They were not eyes looking at him in anger but in pity and in mercy. Peter went outside and wept. And then when our Lord came back from the dead, He appeared to Simon Peter privately so that Simon Peter could get things straightened out with Him.

My friend, if you are a child of God and get into sin, you can come back to Him, but you'd better mean business, and you'd better be sincere. You can go to Him and tell Him what you can tell no one else. He will accept you and receive you -- He is the God of the second chance.

There is another man who failed -- John Mark. He wasn't much of a missionary at first. In fact, he was chicken; he turned and went home. I once heard of a man who said that the reason he didn't fly in airplanes was because he had back trouble. When he was asked what kind of back trouble he had, he replied, "I've got a yellow streak up and down my back." John Mark had a yellow streak up and down his back -- he turned and left that first missionary journey of the apostle Paul. Good old Barnabas wanted to forgive him and take him on the second missionary journey, but Paul said, "I won't take him again. I'm through with him. I'm not about to take with me anyone who turns and runs home to mama as that boy did." Paul had to change his mind later, because God will receive, and God did receive John Mark. So when Paul wrote his swan song, 2 Timothy, he said, "Take, Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry" ([2Tim. 4:11](#)). John Mark made good. Aren't you glad that God gives us a second chance?

My final illustration is one not from the Bible but is very much up-to-date. Years ago here in Southern California, I was teaching the Book of Jonah on an evening radio broadcast that I had at that time. A day or two after I had enlarged on this first verse of the third chapter, I received a letter from a medical doctor in Beverly Hills, California. He said, "I want you to know that this verse is now the most important verse in the Bible to me. When you said that God is the God of the second chance, I came back to Him." He went on in his letter to tell me his story. He had come from Chicago where he had been a prominent doctor and also an officer in the church. Problems arose in the church which involved the handling of property and funds. He was blamed for the problems, although he was not guilty and had not been involved at all. He became bitter and actually left the Chicago area. He came to California and established an office here, but he never would darken the door of a church. He did, however, listen to me on the radio. When I said that God is a God of the second chance, this man wrote that "it was just like a cool drink of water to a man who was out on the desert, dying of thirst. That meant more to me than anything." I sat down and wrote that man a letter, and I did what any preacher would do - I urged him to get into a church and to get busy again for the Lord. He wrote again and said, "I'm already back in church and busy for the Lord." God is the God of the second chance, my friend; He is wonderful.

Jonah's story is an illustration of how God treats His children when they sin and come back to Him. The prodigal son came home. When he came home, he didn't get a beating; he got a banquet. He didn't get kicked around; he got kisses. Instead of the poor boy being put out of the house and rejected, the father took the boy back. How wonderful this is!

Jonah Arrives In Nineveh (3:2-4)

Now we are going to see how God is gracious to a sinful city. This is a record of perhaps the greatest revival in the history of the world; that is, what we call a revival -- people turning to God. What happened in Nineveh makes the Day of Pentecost look very small. A few thousand turned to God on the Day of Pentecost, but there were several hundred thousand in the city of Nineveh who turned to God. There has never been anything quite like it -- an entire city turned to God! No one else has ever seen that happen. The apostle Paul never stayed in a city until everyone was converted; he just preached the Word and

moved on to the next town. No one from that day down to the present has seen such a moving of the Spirit of God as took place in Nineveh so long ago.

It is interesting to note that all this happened in Nineveh before the church arrived on the scene, and the greatest revival of all time will take place after the church leaves the earth. You see, God is simply not dependent upon the church. If you have the notion that the church or your church or your group are the only ones God has ever had in mind, I say to you very candidly that it is a false notion. God has something even bigger in mind than the church. Now the church is to be the bride of Christ and will, I think, occupy the very closest place to the Son of God throughout eternity, but God had a purpose in mind before the church got here and even before man appeared on this earth. God was not sitting around, twiddling His thumbs and waiting for man to come along, my friend!

Today His purpose is to call out a people from every tribe, tongue, and nation. We believe that we are coming to the end of the age and that God wants the Word to go out so that everyone might hear. However, the greatest revival, the greatest turning to God, is yet in the future, and the story of Nineveh is just a small adumbration of that.

Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee [[Jonah 3:2](#)].

We have been told before that this city of Nineveh was a great city (see [Jonah 1:2](#)), and the last verse of the book of Jonah also says, "And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?" ([Jonah 4:11](#)). The unbeliever has criticized the Book of Jonah on many counts, and one of them is the fact that three times in this book it says that Nineveh was a great city, an exceeding great city. The Ninevites were great in sin, to be sure, but they also had a very large city.

However, nothing was known about Nineveh until 1845 when Sir Austen Layard was the first to examine the ruins of this city; he and George Smith excavated the ancient city of Nineveh. Nineveh proper, that is, the tell of Nineveh, was across the Tigris River from the modern city of Mosul. It was built in the shape of a trapezium, which was about two and one-half miles in length and a mile and one-third in breadth. That would make it a pretty good-sized place, but I would say very frankly that that does not meet the demands of the Book of Jonah.

The city of Nineveh lay in a plain which was almost entirely surrounded by rivers. The Tigris River came along to a point at which the Upper Zab River ran into it, forming a V-shaped valley between the two rivers. Then across the top of them, at the north, there was a range of mountains. This entire area, therefore, was protected by the natural fortifications of the rivers and the mountains. There were several prominent cities in this natural enclosure. Nineveh was located up on the Tigris River. Down at the fork where the Upper Zab flowed into the Tigris was Calah, as it is called in Scripture, now known as the Nimrud ruins. Calah was eighteen miles southeast of Nineveh proper. The city of Khorsabad was twelve miles to the northeast of Nineveh on the Upper Zab River.

This statement by Jonah that Nineveh was a great city sounds strange for a day when cities were walled and were by necessity very compact and small. What surprises many

folk when they go to Jerusalem is the fact that the walled city is so small. It was even smaller in Christ's day and certainly in David's day than it is today. The walled city of ancient days was very compact. It was really a fortress for the people to come into in time of siege. In Nineveh there were really three walled cities -- Nineveh proper, Calah, and Khorsabad. Nineveh became the capital, and the entire area was known by its name. In that fertile valley, then, there lived a great multitude of folk who in time of siege would go into these cities. They tell us that one of the reasons Nineveh fell was not primarily because of the enemy from the outside, but because of a flood that took out one whole section of the wall of the city.

It is quite interesting that when we go back to the Book of Genesis, we read this: "Out of that land went forth Asshur, and builded Nineveh, and the city Rehoboth, and Calah, and Resen between Nineveh and Calah: the same is a great city" ([Gen. 10:11-12](#)). All the way through the Word of God, the greatness of this city is emphasized. All of this area was given the name of Nineveh because it was the capital.

One of the ancient writers, Ctesias, describes Nineveh as a city whose circuit is 480 stadia. This would mean that its circumference was over twenty-seven miles.

So we find that Nineveh was "an exceeding great city" with one community after another. Here in Southern California we have a situation very similar to Nineveh's. The Los Angeles area includes at least twenty-five smaller municipalities besides the actual city of Los Angeles. We speak of all of them as being a part of "the greater Los Angeles area," which covers a great deal of ground. In fact, the joke during World War II was that a soldier who got lost up in Alaska and was trying to find his way back finally came to a sign that said, LOS ANGELES CITY LIMITS, and he knew he was no longer lost!

Nineveh was a great city -- great in size and great in wickedness. This city was guilty of the same sins, which we read about in the other prophetic books, that brought God's judgment. In the Books of Amos and Hosea, we find that the reason God brought judgment upon the people was because of their luxurious living and sexual immorality, because of their godless music, and because of their drunkenness. The same things could be said of Nineveh. They were given over to idolatry, their cruelty and brutality to their enemies were unspeakable, and there was gross immorality in the city. It was a city of wine and women, of the bottle and the brothel, of sauce and sex. These were the things that identified the great city of Nineveh.

It is into this great city that Jonah is now called to go and to minister.

So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey [[Jonah 3:3](#)].

Notice that Jonah is now doing things "according to the word of the LORD." The first time he had set sail for Tarshish, which was not according to the word of the Lord; now he is going into Nineveh according to the word of the Lord.

"Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey." This, of course, is the statement which caused the critics to laugh and to ridicule. The fact of the matter is, as we have explained, it would take several hours to go through just one of these cities, but

there were three cities as well as a great area between them in which was a population estimated at several million. It is into this area that Jonah is now coming. It was "an exceeding great city of three days' journey."

And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown [Jonah 3:4].

The point is that it took Jonah quite a while to cover this ground. He didn't have radio, he didn't even have a loud speaker -- and I've often wondered how he did it. I think of Nineveh's similarity to the Los Angeles area. I live in a city called Pasadena, about ten miles from downtown Los Angeles. To the south of Pasadena about twenty-five miles is Long Beach, and to the west about twenty miles is Santa Monica. All in between there is just one city after another. Imagine Jonah starting out walking here in Southern California (he didn't have a car, by the way). He would stop at a street corner, a busy intersection, and give his message. Then he would move on down the street to another intersection and, while he was waiting for the traffic signal to change, he would speak to another crowd. In this manner it would take him quite some time to get through a city.

At this point someone is going to ask me, "How did Jonah get a crowd?" Drawing a crowd is always a problem for a preacher. It's natural and normal for us to want as many people as possible to hear the Word of God. How did Jonah do it? He didn't use any of our modern methods or our modern tactics. He didn't rent a great auditorium and put on a great campaign -- there's nothing wrong with that; in fact, that's very right to do today -- but Jonah didn't do it. He didn't use any gimmicks. He didn't bring in celebrities or some great singer. He didn't entertain the crowd. That was not his method.

Jonah used a method that is a little different from any that we could use today. His method was that he was a man from the dead, and I think he was rather spectacular to see. A man who has spent three days and three nights in a fish simply cannot come out looking like he did when he went in!

If you recall the illustrations which I gave earlier of the men who had been swallowed by a fish and lived to tell the story, you will remember that the late Dr. Harry Rimmer told about seeing one man who had spent two days inside a fish. The man was put on display in London as "the Jonah of the twentieth century." When Dr. Rimmer interviewed him two years after it had happened, this man didn't have a hair on his body, and his skin was a yellowish-brown color. You see, the gastric juices of the fish had reacted upon the individual as the fish had tried to digest him.

Those chemicals were bound to have an effect upon him, and this is apparently what happened to Jonah also. You can imagine the color of Jonah's skin, and you can imagine how he must have looked. When he stopped at a corner and the crowd gathered, they would say, "Brother, where have you been?" Jonah told them, "I am a man from the dead. A fish swallowed me because God had sent me to Nineveh but I tried to run away to Tarshish." People didn't ridicule Jonah's story. They listened to him.

I am told that in Russia today, out through the rural areas, there is a great company of people who have turned to the Lord. On one of our tours to Bible lands, I went ahead of

the group and was fortunate to go through Belgrade, Yugoslavia. There was a mix-up about the time we were to be there, but I understand that there were some five hundred Christians who were going to be there to welcome us had they known our arrival time. This happened because some of our tapes are being translated into Yugoslavian, Romanian, and several other languages and are being used by folk there today. There is a real moving of the spirit of God in places where we would not expect it.

Who would have thought that in the wicked city of Nineveh people would listen to the Word of God and to a man who said, "I'm back from the dead"? By the way, that is the same message we have. We have a message concerning a man who came back from the dead. Paul writes, ". . . if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification" ([Rom. 4:24-25](#)).

Jonah entered the city with a message of judgment: "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." I think Jonah gave that message with relish -- he didn't like Ninevites!

Nineveh Believes God (3:5-8)

So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them [[Jonah 3:5](#)].

"So the people of Nineveh believed God" -- that is a marvelous statement to find in the Old Testament. All God has ever asked any person, any sinner, to do is simply to believe Him. What does He ask you to believe? Believe what He has done for you. Believe that Christ died for you -- that He died for you and for your sins. Believe that He was raised again and is now at God's right hand. The people of Nineveh believed God -- that is still the important thing today.

I am afraid that we have in our churches many people who are as busy as termites -- they take little courses, and they talk a great deal about the Bible -- but they do not know God. I was speaking with a man the other day who is that type of an individual; he goes to everything that comes along. I had gotten a little weary of hearing him tell about where he'd been and what he'd seen. He has done very little, but he is always telling about the great meetings he attends. I asked him pointblank, "Do you believe God?" He thought for a minute and then said, "Well, I think I do." May I say to you, all of his work is of no value because he does not really believe God.

"So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast." They demonstrated their belief. Faith always leads to works. "And put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them."

For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes [[Jonah 3:6](#)].

Friend, when people start doing these things they no longer will be committing sin. They are in deep repentance before God and are asking God for mercy. And when you ask God for mercy, you are going to find out that He is merciful.

And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water [[Jonah 3:7](#)].

These people, many of whom were alcoholics, are now told not even to drink water.

But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands [[Jonah 3:8](#)].

You, also, must turn from sin, my friend. If you come to Christ, you can come just as you are, but when you come, you will turn from sin. You cannot possibly accept Him and not turn from sin.

"Let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands." The Ninevites were a brutal and violent people. They were given to riots. They were given to cruelty and brutality and mob rule. Now the king says, "Turn from all of that and cry to God for mercy."

The strangest thing happened -- the whole city turned to God! Now that was remarkable; in fact, it was quite amazing. From the king on the throne to the peasant in the hovel, they all turned to the Lord. They cried mightily to God, and they believed God. What a glorious, wonderful time this was!

We hear today that we are having revival in certain places. I do not think that you can call what is taking place anywhere (certainly not in the United States) a revival. I do think we are seeing a great moving of the Spirit of God in certain places. Wherever the Word of God is preached and taught, you will see a moving of the Spirit of God; but we are not seeing revival. Instead, we find that the church is quite inactive as far as getting out the Word of God, winning people to Christ, and building them up in the faith.

When I speak of the church, I mean you and me, all of us who are believers, regardless of the group with which we are identified or the local assembly to which we go. Someone sent me this little quote because he had heard me say that there are a great many church members who are not real believers. Here it is: "Church members are either pillars or caterpillars. The pillars hold up the church; the caterpillars just crawl in and out." That's accurate, my friend. That is our problem today. We have too many caterpillars and not enough pillars to hold up the church.

Nineveh Is Not Destroyed (3:9-10)

Jonah went to the city of Nineveh, and the entire city turned to God. This was something that had never happened before. Certainly Noah didn't have this kind of experience! -- but Jonah did. What will God do now that the city has turned to Him? The king himself asks the question --

Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?

And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not [[Jonah 3:9-10](#)].

We have come to what is probably the strongest statement in Scripture about God repenting. What does it mean when Scripture says that God repented? Does God repent? The word repentance as it is used in both the Old and New Testaments primarily means "a change of mind." In the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament), the word is *metanoesen*, meaning "to change your mind." The question arises then: Does God change His mind?

One of the attributes of God is that He is immutable, which means that He never changes. There is no reason for God to change. He knows the end from the beginning. When the Los Angeles Times came out this morning, it didn't tell God a thing. God has not learned anything from the politicians or from our colleges today -- they haven't taught Him anything. God knows the end from the beginning, and there is no reason for Him to change His mind. He is carrying on the program that He outlined at the beginning, and He is simply following through on it. Therefore, God does not change.

But Scripture does say that God repents. Follow me carefully here: There are expressions used in the Word of God which are called anthropomorphic terms; that is, there are certain attributes of man which are ascribed to God. In the Bible certain physical and psychological attributes of man are attributed to God.

First of all, let us look at some physical attributes of mankind that are ascribed to God. It says in Scripture that ". . . the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth . . ." ([2Chron. 16:9](#), italics mine). Does that mean that God has eyes like I have? If He does, are they blue or brown or gray eyes? God is a spirit, and He does not have eyes like we have. But the one who made the eye can see, and He can see without the eye. The Lord knew that Vernon McGee would have a problem understanding that, and so He said, "The eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth." I can understand that now -- that means that God sees everything. That is an anthropomorphic term, ascribing to God an attribute that belongs to man in order that we can understand.

The Bible also speaks of the arm of the Lord and the hand of the Lord. That is very helpful to my understanding, but the one who made my hand and my arm does not have a hand or an arm like I have because God is a spirit. But the Bible says, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork" ([Ps. 19:1](#)) -- that really means finger work. John Wesley put it like this: "God created the heavens and the earth, and He didn't even half try." Finger work is like crocheting or knitting; it doesn't require a great deal of muscle. You don't have to do sitting up exercises for six months before you can learn to knit. God created the heavens and the earth -- that is His finger work.

However, when Isaiah was speaking of God's salvation and His redemption, he said, "Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the [bared] arm of the LORD revealed?" ([Isa. 53:1](#), italics mine). I understand now what I would not have understood before: It cost God more, and it was more difficult for Him to redeem man than it was for Him to create a universe.

These are examples of anthropomorphic terms, of physical attributes of man being attributed to God for the sake of our understanding. The Scriptures also attribute certain psychological attributes of man to God. For example, the anger of the Lord. Does God get angry? He surely does. He is angry with the wicked all of the time. God can get angry, but His anger is not like my anger. I get angry when I hear that someone has said something bad about me, but that doesn't bother God at all. His anger is not peevish or petulant but is an anger that is against all wickedness and sin.

Scripture tells us that God loves, and that is something I can understand. In fact, in the little Book of Ruth, God takes a very human relationship -- the love of a man for a woman -- as a picture of His love for us. Also, the church is called the bride of Christ. That tells us something of the love of God. God loves you, and you cannot keep Him from loving you.

Here in Jonah we have another example: God repents. To repent means to change your mind; that is what it means when it applies to me. When I repent, I change my mind. I did something wrong, and I now see that it was wrong. I turn from it, and I go to God and ask forgiveness for it -- I come over on God's side. To confess your sin is to come over and agree with God about your sin.

But does God repent like that? Does He change His mind? Does He say, "My, I made a mistake there; I shouldn't destroy Nineveh"? No. We need to see that the city of Nineveh had two options when this man Jonah entered it with his message of judgment. They could reject God's message, they could ignore it, they could pay no attention to it, and if they did, they would be destroyed -- God's never changed that. Or they could accept God's message, they could turn to Him, and God would deliver and save them. God is immutable -- He never changes. When His Word is rejected, when people turn from Him, they are lost. But when they turn to Him, He will always save them, regardless of who they are.

Therefore, who changed? Did God change? No, but it looked as if He did. Jonah had said, "Yet forty days, and this city is going to be destroyed. God is going to destroy it." But God did not destroy Nineveh. Did God break His Word? No. God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. The city had two options. If they had not accepted His Word, they would have been destroyed. But they did accept God's message, they believed God, and they turned from their wickedness. God didn't change; He will always save people when they turn to Him. Although it looked as if God changed, it was really the city of Nineveh that changed, and that makes all the difference in the world.

Chapter 4

THEME: Jonah's displeasure; God's gracious dealing with Jonah

This fourth chapter is like an addendum to the Book of Jonah, because at the end of chapter 3 the mission is accomplished. As you know, I arranged each chapter of this book according to a timetable. In chapter 1, Jonah left the northern kingdom of Israel, probably from Gath-hepher, his hometown. His destination was Nineveh, and it took him three chapters to get there. But he accomplished his mission, and the entire city turned to God.

It would seem that the book ought to end there. But the problem no longer is Nineveh -- the problem now is Jonah. Jonah was a problem child. God had more trouble with a backsliding prophet by the name of Jonah than He had with an entire city of brutal, cruel, pagan sinners.

If I had had the privilege of being the one who brought God's message to Nineveh and had seen the result that Jonah saw, I believe that I would have gone down to the Western Union office and sent a telegram back to my hometown. I would want to tell people what had happened and cause them to praise and thank God for what had been accomplished. I would rejoice in it, but that is because of where I am and because I am under altogether different circumstances. If I had been in Jonah's shoes, if I had been in Jonah's fish, I might have had the same feeling that he did. Yet his reaction is something that seems unbelievable. In fact, I have no problem with the fish, but I have a lot of problems with this man Jonah. At the very beginning, he was called to go in one direction, and he headed in the other direction. I don't understand that -- until I look closely at my own heart and see that I have headed in the wrong direction several times when it was very clear that God wanted me to go in the opposite direction.

Jonah now has a new destination. He is going to leave Nineveh, and he is glad to get out of town. His destination now is a gourd vine or, as I would like to imagine, a trailer court outside the city. Jonah goes out of the city and finds himself a little spot where he can park his camper for awhile. As he leaves Nineveh, his destination is a little spot outside the city, and he is going to arrive in the heart of God. I do not know of a better place for anybody to arrive than in the heart of God, and that is where this prophet is going to arrive.

God is going to seek to win Jonah over to His viewpoint. This chapter will demonstrate to us the fact that God will never interfere with your free will. He is not going to force you on any issue whatsoever, for you are a free moral agent. God has actually moved heaven and hell and has come by way of a cross to knock at your heart's door. But, my friend, He will not come any farther than that until that door is opened, and it must be opened from the inside. He will never crash the door of your heart; He will never push it in; He will never come in uninvited. God is now going to have to deal with a backsliding prophet who has a pretty strong will and who hates Ninevites. He is going to try to win Jonah over to His viewpoint.

Jonah's Displeasure (4:1-3)

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry [[Jonah 4:1](#)].

It didn't simply displease Jonah a little bit; it displeased him exceedingly. He wasn't angry just a little bit; he was very angry. What is this man angry about? He's angry because the city of Nineveh turned to God -- he didn't like that.

And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil [[Jonah 4:2](#)].

"And he prayed unto the LORD" -- the last time Jonah prayed he was inside the fish. Here he is outside of Nineveh, with his camper parked up there in a little trailer court, and as he sits in the shade of it, he prays. He's very unhappy; in fact, he's miserable.

You may have felt that I was inaccurate in the Introduction when I said that Jonah had hatred and bitterness in his heart against the Ninevites, that he probably had justification for it, and that it was one of the reasons he did not want to go to Nineveh. But listen to him now: "O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil."

Years ago I heard a liberal lecturing at Vanderbilt University who said that Jonah's problem was that he did not know God. I don't like to say it like this, but the problem with that lecturer was that he didn't know the Book of Jonah. It is very clear that Jonah did know God and that he knew Him very well, probably better than that lecturer knew God. Jonah says to God, "I knew You were gracious, I knew You were merciful, I knew You were slow to anger, and I knew You were of great kindness. And I knew that although You said You would destroy Nineveh in forty days, if Nineveh would turn to You, You would save them because that's what You always do." Jonah knew God and, knowing God, he said, "I hate Ninevites. I don't want them saved. I want God to judge them." So he had headed in the opposite direction from Nineveh. Jonah said, "If those Ninevites would turn to God, God would save them, and you just can't depend on Ninevites -- they might put up a good front. They might say that they've turned to God." Jonah should have known that God knew their hearts and knew whether they were genuine or not. But Jonah did know how merciful and good and gracious God is.

Jonah is in great bitterness and anger. Listen to him --

Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live [[Jonah 4:3](#)].

Two of the great prophets of Scripture said the same thing, that they wanted God to take their lives. In other words, they were actually on the verge of suicide. When the prophet Elijah ran from Jezebel -- another man running away, and it was unlike him -- he went all the way to Beer-sheba, which was the jumping-off place for the Sinai Peninsula. Elijah left his servant there and kept on going as long as he could. When he was out of breath, he crawled up under a juniper tree and he said, "Oh, Lord, let me die!" When God's man does that, that man is exhausted and drained physically, mentally, psychologically, and spiritually. Every drop is drained out of him. That was true of Elijah. He had been busy, and I mean busy, friend! He had withstood the prophets of Baal way up at Mount Carmel. He had been before the public. Although Elijah loved the spectacular and he loved the dramatic, it drained him after awhile. So when he heard that Jezebel was after him, he simply took out for the far country.

Now I think you'll agree that Jonah has really been through the mill -- in fact, he's been through a fish. He had quite an experience. Then he came into the city of Nineveh, he gave out God's Word faithfully, and the city turned to God. This man is now overwrought, overstimulated. He is exhausted, absolutely drained -- and he wants to die.

Many of us reach this stage sometimes. We get to the place where we feel like saying, "This is it. I give up. I quit. I don't want to go any farther." We're tired; we're exhausted. But to wish that you were dead is just about as foolish a thing as you can possibly do. As far as I know, no one has ever died by wishing. People die of cancer, of heart trouble, and of all kinds of things, but they just don't die of wishing to be dead. Jonah is wasting his time.

God's Gracious Dealing With Jonah (4:4-11)

Notice how graciously God deals with this man --

Then said the LORD, Doest thou well to be angry? [[Jonah 4:4](#)].

Dr. G. Douglas Young has given us what I believe is a much better translation here. He has translated it like this: "Is doing good displeasing to you?" -- that's what God meant. God says, "Jonah, I have saved Nineveh because I'm in the saving business and I save sinners. I wanted you to bring them the message of judgment to see whether or not they would turn to Me. If they turned to Me, I would save them. They did turn to Me, and I have saved them." My friend, if there is joy in heaven over one sinner turning to God, they must have had a real big time up there when all the folk in Nineveh turned to God. God asks Jonah, "Is this displeasing to you that I have saved these Ninevites?"

Jonah is in a huff, and he's pouting. Notice what he does --

So Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city [[Jonah 4:5](#)].

"So Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city." The east side of the city was up in the hill country, up at an elevation. Jonah got himself a good spot where he could look out over the city. Why? Because he didn't trust the Ninevites. He thought they would go right back into their sinning; and if they did, he knew God would destroy them because God never changes. Jonah wanted to be up there if the fire fell. That's the kind of man we are dealing with here -- and he's the man who had brought God's message.

"And there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city." He didn't believe Nineveh would stick by their conversion, their confession of faith. He's up there, and he's waiting for the fire of God's judgment to fall.

God is now going to move in on this man Jonah, and He's going to deal with him personally. We are going to have an answer here to the question that is often asked: Do you have to love people before you can bring the Word of God to them? Do you have to love a people before you can go as a missionary to them? Jonah may be a good example in this particular connection, for one thing is sure: Jonah didn't love the Ninevites.

And the LORD God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd [[Jonah 4:6](#)].

"And the LORD God prepared a gourd." This gourd was prepared in the same way that God prepared the fish. If you don't believe in the fish, you ought not to believe in the gourd. I believe in the gourd; I believe in the fish.

"And made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd." Jonah is made happy at last by this little green gourd growing up. Every day Jonah would go down to the Tigris River, fill a bucket with water, and come up and water this gourd that was growing in that dry country. He trained it to run up over his camper, you know. He sat under the shade of it, and he became very attached to it.

If we understand a little about human nature, we can understand Jonah a little better. It is amazing how people can get attached to living things other than human beings, especially if they are lonely. If they have no person to love, they will have a dog or cat or even a vine to love. Several years ago I visited a friend in Chicago who lived in an apartment. She had several plants, and one of them was a geranium. She took me over to show me the geranium which was just a little old stub sticking up out of the pot. In my yard in Pasadena I have to cut back the geraniums with a hoe in order to keep them from taking over! But this lady said to me, "Dr. McGee, look here at this little geranium. I know you grow them in California, but this one is such a sweet one. It grows up each year and has flowers on it. It dies back in wintertime, although the apartment is warm -- I don't know why it does that." I told her. "Well, geraniums have a habit of lunging out in a spurt of growth at times." But hers hadn't done much lunging, you can be sure of that -- it was just a little, bitty thing. As we walked away, she patted that little geranium and said, "You sweet little thing, you!" I thought, My gracious, does she talk to the geranium? I guess she did. She certainly was a very sensible and intelligent woman, but she lived alone and really did not have many friends.

Jonah has no friends, he doesn't like Ninevites, and there's not a person in that city whom he cares about visiting. He's alone, and he's out of fellowship with God at this time. So God lets him get attached to a little old gourd. I have a notion that Jonah would come panting up the hill with a bucket of water every afternoon and would say to the gourd, "Little gourd, I've brought you your drink for today." Can you imagine that? Well, people can get attached to dogs in that way also. One evening when my daughter was just a little thing, I took her for a walk. We came to a corner where there were a lot of vines, and we couldn't see around the corner, but we could hear a woman talking. I have never heard such sweet talk in my life! I thought we were interrupting a romance; so I took my daughter and started to cross the street. But then the woman came around the corner, and she was carrying a little dog. Imagine talking to a dog like that! I do not know if she was married or not, but if she was, I'll bet that her husband wasn't hearing sweet talk like that. We speak of some people leading "a dog's life" -- there are some men who wish they could lead a dog's life! Jonah talked that way to this gourd vine -- he's attached to it!

Watch how God is going to move in on Jonah --

But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day,
and it smote the gourd that it withered [[Jonah 4:7](#)].

"But God prepared a worm" -- this worm is just as miraculous as the fish. "And it smote the gourd that it withered." This worm cut the vine down because worms just don't fall in love with gourds -- they like to eat them.

And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live [[Jonah 4:8](#)].

Here he goes again, wishing -- but it won't do him a bit of good.

And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd?
And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death [[Jonah 4:9](#)].

Jonah says, "The only thing that I had that was living and that I cared for was this little gourd vine that grew up here and that You gave to me. And now the worm has cut the thing down, and here I am all alone."

Then said the LORD, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night [[Jonah 4:10](#)].

God says to Jonah, "Jonah, a gourd is nothing." My friend, I hate to say this, but a pussycat is nothing, a little dog is nothing, but a human being has a soul that is either going to heaven or hell. And God didn't ask you to love the lost before you go to them. He said, "I love the lost, and I want you to go to them." That is what He is saying to Jonah: "Jonah, I love the Ninevites."

And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle? [[Jonah 4:11](#)].

God says, "I have spared this city." What does He mean by "sixscore thousand [120,000] persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand"? He means little children. God says, "You wouldn't want Me to destroy that city, would you, Jonah? If you can fall in love with a gourd vine, can't you at least fall in love with Ninevite children?"

Now may I make this application? When I was teaching in a Bible institute, I used to say, like all the other teachers were saying, that if you are called to go as a missionary, you ought to love the people to whom you go. I disagree violently with that now, because how can you love people before you know them? I first applied that to myself. I have never accepted a call to a church because I loved the people; I didn't know them to begin with. I went because I felt that God had called me to go there and preach. But I also have never been in a church in which I didn't become involved with the people. I have stood at their bedsides in hospitals, I've been at their gravesides when death came, I've been with them in the marriages that have taken place in their families, and I can truthfully say that I have never yet left a church where there wasn't a great company of people whom I loved -- and I really mean that I love them in the Lord. But I did not love them when I went there because I did not know them.

God is saying to a great many people today, "I want you to go and take the Word of God to those who are lost." And they say, "But I don't love them." God says, "I never asked

you to love them; I asked you to go." I cannot find anywhere that God ever asked Jonah to go because he loved the Ninevites. He said, "Jonah, I want you to go because I love them. I love Ninevites. I want to save Ninevites. And I want you to take the message to them."

Again may I say that I am afraid there are a great many people in the church who are caterpillars. Church members are either pillars or caterpillars; the pillars hold up the church, and the caterpillars just crawl in and out. There are a lot of people just crawling in and out of the church, waiting for some great wave of emotion, waiting for some feeling to take hold of them -- and they have never done anything yet. God says that we are to get busy for Him.

I remember talking to a missionary who was home from Africa, and he was showing me a picture of some little black boys in the orphans' home there. I could tell by the way he looked at the picture that he loved those little boys. I said to him, "When you first went to Africa, did you love the Africans?" He said, "No, I really wanted to go to my people in Greece, but at that time the door was closed, and I could not go; so I had to go to Africa." As he held that picture, I said to him, "But do you love those little fellows now?" Tears came down from his eyes. He said, "I love them now." God says to you and me, "You go with the Word. I love the lost. You take the Word to them, and when they are saved and you get acquainted with them and know them, you will love them, too."

Since Jonah wrote the book, I think it is reasonable to say that after this experience, Jonah left the dead gourd vine and went down to where the living were walking the streets of Nineveh, and I think that he rejoiced with them that they had come to a saving knowledge of God. My friend, what a message this is! Why don't you get involved in getting the Word of God out to people? Don't wait for some great feeling to sweep over your soul. Don't wait to be moved by a little picture of an orphan. There are so many people waiting to be motivated by things that are emotional. Take the Word of God to them because God loves them; and if you'll do that, I will guarantee that you will learn to love them also.

Bibliography

(Recommended for Further Study)

Feinberg, Charles L. *The Minor Prophets*. Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1976.

Gaebelein, Arno C. *The Annotated Bible*. 1917. Reprint. Neptune, New Jersey: Loizeaux Brothers, 1971.

Ironside, H. A. *The Minor Prophets*. Neptune, New Jersey: Loizeaux Brothers, n.d.

Jensen, Irving L. *Minor Prophets of Judah*. Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1975.

Tatford, Frederick A. *The Minor Prophets*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Klock & Klock, n.d.

Unger, Merrill F. *Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament*, Vol. 2. Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1982.